

SECTION 1

Purpose of and Need for Proposed Action

Section 1 describes the purpose of and need for improvements being considered for the USH 14/61 corridor between Westby and Viroqua, and the existing and future problems the improvements would correct. Because this is a long-range study, the proposed improvements are intended to correct not only existing problems, but also problems that are likely to occur between now and 2025.

Proposed Action

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) is evaluating long-term improvements to traffic flow and safety on the USH 14/61 corridor between the cities of Viroqua and Westby in west central Vernon County. The *Westby-Viroqua Bypass Corridor Study* is a follow-up to the *Transportation Study for USH 14 Westby/Viroqua* (Gremmer et al. October 1996) conducted by WisDOT, Viroqua, Westby, and Vernon County. The objectives of the 1996 study were to:

- Develop short-term improvements on USH 14/61 (Main Street) in Viroqua to replace the deteriorated pavement, curb, gutter, and sidewalk; replace the aging utility infrastructure; and provide a uniform roadway cross section with limited street parking to improve traffic operations and safety;
- Evaluate long-term improvements, including possible Viroqua and Westby bypasses, to address regional transportation demand/traffic growth, safety, high traffic volumes in Viroqua, and substantial heavy truck traffic in both Viroqua and Westby; and
- Develop a transportation plan for the future that brings together regional and local interests and needs and that will serve as a blueprint to guide future development decisions in Viroqua, Westby, and the surrounding towns.

To implement these objectives, the 1996 *Study* recommended that:

- Main Street in Viroqua be reconstructed in the short term, and
- Long-term improvements, including Westby and Viroqua bypasses, be pursued through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The NEPA process should include a detailed evaluation of alternatives and their impacts, and preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement.

The short-term improvements in Viroqua (Main Street reconstruction) were completed in fall 1999. The present *Westby-Viroqua Corridor Bypass Study* fulfills the recommendation to pursue long-term improvements through the NEPA process.

Study Area and Affected Highways

Exhibit 1-A shows the study area. The USH 14/61 corridor through the study area extends from the STH 27/82 intersection with USH 14/61 south of Viroqua to CTH GG west of Westby, a distance of 27 kilometers (17 miles). Municipalities include the cities of Viroqua and Westby, Vernon County, and the towns of Franklin, Jefferson, Viroqua, Christiana, and Coon.

USH 14/61 passes through downtown Viroqua and Westby. STH 82 is routed concurrent with USH 14/61 to STH 56/82 in downtown Viroqua. STH 56 passes through Viroqua in an east-west direction. STH 27 is routed concurrent with USH 14/61 to a point near Westby's north city limits. From there, it heads to the northeast and connects with Interstate Highway 90 at Sparta, about 37 kilometers (23 miles) from Westby.

Purpose of Proposed Action

The purpose of the proposed USH 14/61 improvements includes the following regional and local objectives:

- Address future traffic demand and growth in the region, and improve local and through traffic access to regional destinations outside the study area, as well as to community resources and services in Viroqua and Westby;
- Improve overall operational efficiency commensurate with the USH 14/61 corridor's designation as a Principal Arterial Highway, Corridors 2020 Connector, National Highway System route, and federal/state long truck route;
- Improve safety for the traveling public by increasing traffic capacity, reducing conflicts between through and local traffic in Viroqua and Westby, and providing a roadway that meets current design standards;
- Improve traffic flow, pedestrian and school bus safety, and emergency service in Viroqua and Westby by removing through truck traffic from downtown Main Street in these communities; and
- Enhance local efforts to revitalize downtown Viroqua and Westby as pedestrian-friendly, tourist-oriented communities by reducing heavy truck traffic in the downtown areas.

Need for Proposed Action

The need for proposed improvements is based on a combination of factors related to:

- Existing and future traffic
- Safety
- System linkage and route importance
- Existing highway characteristics
- Local issues

The remainder of this Section discusses these factors. Together, the purpose of and need for the proposed improvements shapes the range of reasonable Build Alternatives presented in Section 2.

Traffic Data

Existing and forecast traffic volumes provided by WisDOT are expressed as average annual daily traffic (AADT). The volumes reflect *average* travel conditions on a particular highway rather than daily or seasonal variations. WisDOT takes traffic counts in 3-year cycles at numerous rural and urban count stations throughout the state. The raw counts are then factored to account for time of year, day of the week, and number of axles.

Existing traffic volumes on the USH 14/61 corridor are adjusted volumes based on 1998 counts. Forecast traffic volumes are provided for years 2005, 2015, and 2025 to show how traffic is expected to increase over time. Year 2025 is the “design year” and represents the long-range planning period within which traffic forecasts can reasonably be made. Forecast volumes are based on past counts/growth trends, data from WisDOT’s 1991 Traffic Origin-Destination survey, present and future land use trends, and demographic data such as changes in population and employment.

In 1991, WisDOT conducted a traffic origin-destination survey to determine existing travel patterns in the study area. The survey consisted of distributing postcard questionnaires to travelers entering Viroqua and Westby during an 8-hour period. The survey was designed to find out where travelers were coming from and where they were going. Survey stations were located on USH 14/61 south and north of Viroqua and Westby, on STH 56 west and east of Viroqua, and on STH 27 northeast of Westby. The survey data was adjusted to represent daily two-way traffic volumes. It included through trips (traffic passing through Viroqua or Westby without stopping) and local trips (traffic that originates in, has a destination in, or travels entirely within Viroqua or Westby).

State roadway design guidelines specify 8,200 vehicles per day as the threshold volume that can be handled at an acceptable service level by a 2-lane rural Corridors 2020 route, and 13,000 vehicles per day for a 2-lane urban roadway. The threshold is higher for urban roadways because these typically provide a lower level of service due to reduced speed limits, heavier congestion, constraints such as street parking, numerous driveways, and local street intersections.

Local Versus Through Traffic Split

Based on the *1991 Traffic Origin-Destination Survey*, the local versus through traffic split in the study area is summarized as follows:

- **City of Viroqua** – Roughly 35 percent of the total traffic on USH 14/61 travels through the city; the remaining 65 percent is local traffic.
- **City of Westby** – Roughly 60 percent of the total traffic on USH 14/61 travels through Westby; the remaining 40 percent is local traffic.

Current and Forecast Traffic Volumes

Existing and forecast traffic (AADT) in the study area, under the No Action Alternative—, is shown on Exhibit 1-B and summarized as follows:

- **City of Viroqua**— Current traffic near the south city limit is 8,400, and is expected to reach 12,700 in 2025 (45-percent increase). Traffic in the central business district is 11,300, and is expected to reach 21,200 in 2025 (88-percent increase). ¹ Traffic near the north city limit is 12,300, and is expected to reach 22,500 in 2025 (83-percent increase).
- **Between Viroqua and Westby**— Current traffic is 10,900, and is expected to reach 15,800 in 2025 (45-percent increase).
- **City of Westby**— Current traffic near the south city limit is 8,000, and is expected to reach 11,600 in 2025 (45-percent increase). Traffic in the central business district is 8,900, and is expected to reach 12,400 in 2025 (39-percent increase). Traffic near the north city limit, west of STH 27, is 4,700 and is expected to reach 6,300 in 2025 (34-percent increase).

Except for the part of USH 14/61 between STH 27 in Westby and the project's north terminus, existing traffic volumes on the rural part of USH 14/61 within the study area are near or over the 8,200 threshold for a 2-lane rural roadway. Existing volumes in the Viroqua central business district are below, but approaching the 13,000 threshold for a 2-lane urban roadway. ² Existing volumes in the City of Westby are below the 13,000 threshold.

Based on traffic forecasts for 2025, volumes on the entire rural portion of USH 14/61 in the study area, except for a short segment west of Westby, will exceed the 8,200 threshold for a 2-lane rural roadway. Future volumes in the City of Viroqua will be over the 13,000 threshold for a 2-lane urban roadway (see footnote 1). Future volumes in the City of Westby will be near the 13,000 threshold.

Truck Traffic

The number of heavy trucks in the traffic stream affects traffic operations and safety, and contributes to the level of congestion. Heavy trucks are slower, occupy more roadway space, require more turning room, and consequently impose a greater traffic effect on the roadway than passenger vehicles. The overall effect of one truck on traffic operation is often equivalent to several passenger cars. In the study area, each truck on a 2-lane roadway is equivalent to two to five passenger cars. Thus, the larger the proportion of trucks in the traffic stream, the greater the traffic load and highway capacity required (*Highway Capacity Manual Special Report 209*, Third Edition, Transportation Research Board, 1998).

Truck traffic in the study area is summarized as follows:

- **General**— The total truck percentage along the corridor ranges from 9 to 12 percent. Heavy and medium trucks make up about 11 percent of the total traffic in the study area.

¹Traffic counts taken in the Viroqua CBD in November 1999 (following the Main Street reconstruction project) showed an AADT volume of approximately 14,000, an increase of 2,700 over the 1998 data.

²Although the 1999 Main Street reconstruction project in Viroqua provides a 4-lane roadway cross-section through the city, street parking has been retained in the 4-block Central Business District, thus limiting capacity to two driving lanes.

- **City of Viroqua**— Roughly 1,200 heavy and medium trucks per day use USH 14/61 in downtown Viroqua, and 2,300 per day are expected in 2025 (90-percent increase). Based on the 1991 Traffic Origin-Destination Study, the average number of trucks traveling *through* Viroqua is 455 per day. The estimated number of *through* trucks in 2025 is 750 per day.
- **City of Westby**— About 1,000 heavy and medium trucks per day use USH 14/61 in downtown Westby, and 1,300 per day are expected in 2025 (30-percent increase). Based on the 1991 Traffic Origin-Destination survey, the average number of trucks traveling through Westby is 623 per day. The estimated number of through trucks for 2025 is 750 per day.

As part of this study, the project team surveyed businesses in Viroqua and Westby that rely on heavy trucks for shipping/receiving products to obtain information on local truck traffic. The results are summarized as follows:

- Ten out of 15 businesses contacted responded to the Viroqua survey. These businesses generate roughly 167 heavy truck trips per day through Viroqua. Four businesses indicated problems traveling through Viroqua including delays due to congestion, as well as driver concerns about conflicts with parking maneuvers, turning traffic, and pedestrian traffic. Four businesses indicated an east bypass around Viroqua would improve truck service to/from their location and would help alleviate the need for trucks to travel through the city. Two businesses indicated a west bypass around Viroqua would improve truck service.
- Eight out of 10 businesses contacted responded to the Westby survey. These businesses generate a total of 112 to 138 heavy truck trips per day through Westby. Six businesses indicated problems traveling through Westby include delays due to congestion, as well as driver concerns about conflicts with parking maneuvers, turning traffic, and pedestrian traffic. Three businesses indicated a bypass around Westby would improve truck service to/from their location and would help alleviate the need for trucks to travel through the city.

Safety

Roadway safety is measured by the frequency and severity of crashes that occur. An important objective of any transportation improvement is to minimize the overall crash potential through roadway mainline and intersection design features and access management. Arterial roadway design features that affect overall safety include the following:

- 4-lane divided arterials have lower crash rates than undivided roadways.
- Intersections generally have more crashes and more severe crashes than mid-block areas, so intersections are of primary concern on arterial highways. Crashes at intersections are related to total traffic, traffic mix, level of congestion, and intersection design features.
- Roadways with access control (limited driveways and local street connections) have better safety records than those without access control.

Crash information for the study area was derived from WisDOT data for the 4-year period from 1995 through 1998. A total of 231 crashes (excluding deer collisions) occurred during this period, and are summarized as follows:

- 99 crashes occurred outside the cities of Viroqua and Westby (43 percent of the total).
- 88 crashes occurred in the City of Viroqua (38 percent of the total).
- 44 crashes occurred in the City of Westby (19 percent of the total).
- 129 crashes involved property damage only (56 percent of the total).
- 102 crashes involved personal injury (44 percent of the total).
- There was one fatality.
- Most crashes occurred at intersections and involved rear-end collisions, angle, and side-swipe collisions.

WisDOT maintains an annual database on crashes that have occurred on the State Trunk Highway system, and uses this information to develop statewide average crash rates for urban and rural highways. Crash rates are expressed as the number of crashes per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. The comparison between study area crash rates and statewide rates are summarized in Table 1-1. Locations where study area crash rates exceeded the statewide average rates in 1995, 1996, 1997, or 1998 are shown in parentheses.

TABLE 1-1
Study Area Crash Rate Comparison to Statewide Averages

Roadway Segment	1995		1996		1997		1998	
	Study Area Rate	Statewide Rate	Study Area Rate	Statewide Rate	Study Area Rate	Statewide Rate	Study Area Rate	Statewide Rate
STH 27/82 to Viroqua (rural segment)	127	136	62	132	(140)	122	98	115
Washington Street to Decker Street in Viroqua (urban segment)	(383)	359	186	349	164	307	244	288
CTH BB to CTH Y (rural segment)	(165)	136	89	132	86	122	(151)	115
CTH Y to Tri-State Road (rural segment)	58	136	57	132	(136)	122	47	115
Tri-State Road to STH 27 (suburban/urban segment)	272	359	(392)	349	267	307	144	288

Note: Numbers that are bolded and in parentheses indicate that study area crash rates exceeded the statewide average rate.

The 1999 Main Street reconstruction project in Viroqua will help address safety problems in that community. However, as traffic volumes increase in the study area, the number and severity of crashes, particularly those at intersections, can be expected to increase.

System Linkage and Route Importance

USH 14 and USH 61 are major regional highways serving southwestern Wisconsin (see Exhibit 1-C). USH 14 is a major link between Madison and La Crosse. It provides access to recreational and tourism destinations as well as numerous farming communities. USH 61 is the major link (east of STH 35 along the Mississippi River) between Dubuque, Iowa, and La Crosse. USH 14 and USH 61 join at Readstown about 18 kilometers (11 miles) southeast of Viroqua. From there, routing is concurrent to La Crosse.

USH 14 and USH 61 are included in Wisconsin's portion of the National Highway System (NHS) designated under the 1998 *Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century* (TEA 21). Highways in the NHS are those that serve major population centers, intermodal transportation facilities, major travel destinations, and that serve as connectors to the national defense highway network.

USH 61 outside the study area, and USH 14/61 within the study area are designated as "connectors" under WisDOT's *Corridors 2020 Plan*, which was developed to provide a network of high quality highways to link and serve the state's major economic and tourism centers. Connector highways are intended to link smaller economic and tourism centers to the Corridors 2020 backbone system, thus integrating these resources into the statewide and national transportation network. Exhibit 1-D illustrates the Corridors 2020 Backbone and Connector highway system.

USH 14 and USH 61 are designated federal/state "long truck routes," allowing trucks up to 19.5 meters (65 feet) in length to use the highways.

USH 14/61 is a designated access management corridor under WisDOT's *Statewide Access Management Plan*. Access management on designated corridors like USH 14/61 is considered essential to improving safety and preserving traffic flow. The *Access Management Plan* sets forth guidelines that maintain a high level of service for through traffic while providing reasonable local road and property access. The plan's goal is to seek a balance between public investments in highway improvements and the need for land development, tax base growth, and job creation.

WisDOT designated USH 14/61 within the study area (outside the Viroqua and Westby corporate limits) as an access-controlled highway under Section 84.25, Wisconsin Statutes. Access control regulates the amount and spacing of access points allowed to connect to a major highway, preserves the traffic carrying capacity of the existing roadway, and enhances safety. Written approval from WisDOT is required for any new local road/street or private driveway connections to USH 14/61. WisDOT is in the process of acquiring access rights along the corridor; this has been completed for the study area between CTH GG and Cut-A-Cross Road, and between Viroqua and the USH 14/61 intersection with STH 27/82.

At the local level, USH 14/61 is Main Street in downtown Viroqua and Westby. It provides access to residential, commercial, and industrial development in Viroqua and Westby, as well as to community resources and services such as schools, medical facilities, churches, the Vernon County Fairgrounds, and federal, state, and local government offices. The City of Viroqua was selected to join the Wisconsin Main Street Program in 1989. The Main Street Program, administered by the Wisconsin Department of Commerce, was established in

1987 to encourage and support revitalization of downtown communities. Revitalization objectives include business district enhancement, protecting and restoring historic buildings, landscaping and lighting, creating a pedestrian-friendly setting, and retail and other economic development/promotions to encourage consumer and visitor traffic in the downtown.

Existing Highway Characteristics

Geometrics

USH 14/61 outside Viroqua and Westby is a 2-lane rural roadway. The pavement is 7.2 meters wide (24 feet) with variable-width paved and gravel shoulders. The existing right-of-way south of Viroqua varies from 43 meters (140 feet) to 67 meters (220 feet). Right-of-way between Viroqua and Westby varies from 24 meters (80 feet) to 79 meters (260 feet), and varies from 24 meters (80 feet) to 73 meters (240 feet) west of Westby. The posted speed limit is 55 mph. There are numerous driveways, field entrances, and local road connections to USH 14/61. The horizontal alignment and vertical profile meet design standards for a 55-mph design speed.

Existing USH 14/61 (Main Street) in Viroqua was reconstructed in 1999 to a 4-lane, 16-meter-wide (52-foot) urban cross section between the south city limits and the Vernon County Fairgrounds. Improvements included pavement, curb and gutter, sidewalk, and utility infrastructure replacement; removal of street parking except in the 4-block central business district; and upgrading the existing traffic signal at the STH 56 (Decker Street) intersection. Although a 4-lane roadway cross section is provided throughout most of the city, street parking has been retained in the four-block central business district, thus limiting capacity to two driving lanes. The posted speed limit is 25 mph in the downtown area. There are numerous driveways and local street connections to USH 14/61 within the corporate limits.

USH 14/61 (Main Street) in the City of Westby is a 2-lane urban roadway with curb and gutter and sidewalk. The existing roadway varies in width from 13 meters (44 feet) to 15 meters (49 feet). Parking is allowed on both sides of Main Street throughout the city. The posted speed limit is 25 mph in the downtown area. There are numerous driveway and local street connections to USH 14/61. The horizontal alignment through Westby meets current design standards. There is one location where the vertical profile does not meet current design standards for a 30-mph design speed.

Capacity

The traffic volume a highway can handle while providing an acceptable level of service, is related to traffic volumes and mix (autos and trucks), peak hour characteristics, the number of driving lanes, presence or absence of traffic signals, roadway alignment, access type, and spacing. Guidelines for appropriate levels of service on various types of highways have been established by WisDOT in Chapter 11 of the Facilities Development Manual.

Level of service designations range from “A” to “F,” with “A” representing free-flow traffic, and “F” representing gridlock traffic conditions. Table 1-2 summarizes level of service thresholds for various types of highways. For the study corridor, level of service C is the Design Capacity threshold. Level of service E represents Maximum Capacity. In general,

Design Capacity and Maximum Capacity indicate traffic flow conditions on a particular highway. For highways approaching or at Design Capacity, traffic flow is relatively stable with enough gaps between vehicles to allow drivers to maintain a constant speed, and to make safe maneuvers such as passing and turning. When Design Capacity is exceeded, gaps between vehicles are fewer, and the average driving speed is reduced as well as driver freedom to make safe maneuvers. For highways approaching or at Maximum Capacity, traffic flow is unstable and minor disruptions may cause traffic backups or stoppage. Driver freedom to make safe maneuvers is severely limited.

TABLE 1-2
Level of Service Design Guidelines(Roadway Mainline)

Highway Type	Level of Service Thresholds	
	Rural and Small Urban Areas (Population < 50,000)	Urbanized Areas (Population > 50,000)
Corridors 2020 Backbone Routes	C	C
Corridors 2020 Connector Routes	C	D
Other Principal Arterials	D	E
Minor Arterials	D	E
Collectors and Local Roads	D	E

LOS A—Free flow with low volumes and high speeds

LOS B—Reasonably free flow, but speeds beginning to be restricted by traffic conditions.

LOS C—In stable flow zone, but speed selection is restricted.

LOS D—Approaching unstable flow, and driver freedom to maneuver is restricted

LOS E—Unstable flow, short stoppages (represents **Maximum Capacity**)

LOS F—Breakdown flow, gridlock

Existing and future levels of service along the USH 14/61 corridor, compared to the WisDOT design guidelines, are summarized in Table 1-3. The level of service data is based on peak hour traffic volumes for existing (1999) and future (2025) conditions under the No Action Alternative.

As shown in Table 1-3, under present peak traffic volumes, all six sections along the USH 14/61 corridor outside Viroqua and Westby are at or over Design Capacity, and four sections are approaching or at Maximum Capacity. Under 2025 peak volumes, there will be a further decline in the level of service such that all six sections will be over Design Capacity, and all will be at or approaching Maximum Capacity. An improvement in the level of service is expected in the West Broadway to CTH BB segment because of WisDOT's planned improvements around the CTH BB intersection in 2003.

Highway Operation

Efficient operation on highways like USH 14/61 is related to its functional classification and extent of local road and driveway access.

TABLE 1-3
Existing and Future Level of Service (LOS) Comparison

Roadway Segment/Applicable LOS Design Guidelines	Existing LOS (1999)	Future LOS (2025)
STH 27/82 to CTH SS (Rural—LOS C)	LOS C (at Design Capacity)	LOS D (over Design Capacity)
CTH SS to STH 56 in Viroqua (Suburban/Urban—LOS C)	LOS D/E (approaching/at Maximum Capacity)	LOS E/F* (at Maximum Capacity)
W. Broadway in Viroqua to CTH BB (Suburban/Urban—LOS C)	LOS D/E (approaching/at Maximum Capacity)	LOS B
CTH BB to CTH Y (Rural—LOS C)	LOS C/D (at/over Design Capacity)	LOS D/E (approaching or at Maximum Capacity)
CTH Y to Tri-State Road (Rural—LOS C)	LOS D/E (approaching/at Maximum Capacity)	LOS E (at Maximum Capacity)
Tri-State Road to State Street in Westby (Suburban/Urban—LOS C)	LOS D/E (approaching/at Maximum Capacity)	LOS E (at Maximum Capacity)

* Part of the segment within Viroqua would operate at LOS B.

Highways are functionally classified by the nature and types of trips that take place on them and by their relationship to abutting land use. A well-designed highway network provides separate facilities to serve various functions such as local access, traffic collection and distribution, and through travel. Operational problems occur when functions are mixed; e.g., fully developed urban streets that carry through traffic and arterial roadways that have numerous access points. Highways with little or no access control operate less efficiently (have lower capacity) and tend to have more safety problems than those with controlled access.

USH 14/61 is functionally classified as a Principal Arterial Highway. Principal Arterials provide a high level of through traffic mobility, serve trip length and traffic volumes indicative of statewide or interstate travel, and provide service between regional economic centers. Existing USH 14/61 serves a mix of local and through traffic, including heavy trucks passing through the study area or destined for industrial parks and businesses in Viroqua and Westby, school buses, emergency vehicles, and farm machinery. This traffic and service mix is not consistent with the classification of USH 14/61 as a Principal Arterial Highway.

There are more than 75 access points (driveways, field entrances, and local roads) along the USH 14/61 rural areas outside Viroqua and Westby. There are more than 170 access points within the Viroqua corporate limits, and over 110 access points within the Westby corporate limits. Cross traffic turning to and from driveways and local roads, combined with speed changes and lack of auxiliary lanes to get around the turning vehicles, reduces operational efficiency, capacity, and travel speed along the existing highway.

Local Issues

Local purpose and need issues were identified through the study's Project Advisory Committee, through coordination with local officials and other interests, and through the

public information meetings and local information centers held during the course of developing and refining the alternatives. Key local issues are summarized as follows:

- There is a strong desire to remove through truck traffic from downtown Viroqua and Westby. Heavy trucks are presently required to travel through downtown commercial and residential , development. These trucks contribute substantially to congestion and traffic queues, frequently block intersections, make it difficult to enter and exit residential and commercial driveways and on-street parking stalls, and are a safety concern for pedestrian traffic. High volumes of truck traffic are incompatible with Viroqua’s Main Street Program objectives to revitalize the central business district in a way that attracts visitors and new business and that offers a safe and pedestrian-friendly environment for shopping and other activities.
- There is concern about school bus operations and safety. The transportation director for the Westby school system indicated congestion is such that drivers have difficulty getting on and off Main Street in Westby, particularly during the after-school runs. In the rural area, for safety reasons, drivers pull into driveways along USH 14/61 rather than stopping on the shoulder. It is then difficult to get the buses back to normal operating speed. The transportation director for the Viroqua school system indicated that overall traffic congestion in the downtown makes it difficult for drivers to enter and exit Main Street. The CTH BB and Decker Street intersections are particular problem areas.
- Outside Viroqua and Westby, local officials and land owners have expressed a strong preference for minimizing the effects of highway improvements on rural residential, and farm properties, using the existing highway corridor to the extent possible, and for preserving the rural character, open space, and natural resources in the study area.

Purpose and Need Summary

The purpose of the proposed USH 14/61 improvements include a combination of regional and local objectives, summarized as follows:

- Address future traffic demand and growth in the region, and improve local and through traffic access to regional destinations and community resources;
- Improve operational efficiency commensurate with the designation of USH 14/61 as a Principal Arterial, Corridors 2020 Connector, National Highway System route, and federal/state long truck route;
- Improve safety for the traveling public by increasing traffic capacity, reducing congestion, and minimizing conflicts between local and through traffic;
- Address local concerns in Viroqua and Westby by reducing the amount of traffic and heavy trucks that travel through these communities, and enhance local efforts to revitalize their downtowns; and
- Provide transportation improvements that will serve as a blueprint to assist local communities in future growth and development decisions.

The need for the proposed improvements includes a combination of factors related to:

- Forecast traffic increases
- Safety
- System linkage and route importance
- Existing highway characteristics
- Local issues

Each of these factors is summarized below.

Forecast Traffic

Based on traffic forecasts for 2025, volumes on the entire rural portion of USH 14/61, except for a short segment west of Westby, will exceed the 8,200 threshold for a 2-lane rural Corridors 2020 route. Future volumes in Viroqua will be over the 13,000 threshold for a 2-lane urban roadway. Although the 1999 Main Street reconstruction project provides a 4-lane roadway cross section through the city, street parking has been retained in the 4-block central business district, thus limiting capacity to two driving lanes. Future volumes in the Westby central business district will be near the 13,000 threshold.

In 2025, total truck traffic in Viroqua is expected to be 2,300 per day (90-percent increase over present volumes). Through trucks will increase to 750 per day (65-percent increase over present volumes). Total truck traffic in Westby is expected to be 1,300 per day (30-percent increase over present volumes). Through trucks will increase to 950 per day (52-percent increase over present volumes).

Safety

Five locations exceeded statewide average crash rates in 1995, 1996, 1997, or 1998.

Forty-three percent of the total crashes in the study area occurred outside Viroqua and Westby, 38 percent of the total occurred in Viroqua, and 19 percent occurred in Westby. As traffic volumes increase, the number and severity of crashes, particularly at intersections, can also be expected to increase.

System Linkage and Route Importance

USH 14/61 is a major transportation system link in southwestern Wisconsin, serving recreational and tourism resources between Madison and La Crosse, and between Dubuque, Iowa, and La Crosse. USH 14/61 is part of the National Highway System designated to serve major population centers, intermodal transportation facilities, and major travel destinations, as well as to provide connections to the national defense highway network. USH 14/61 is designated as a Corridors 2020 Connector highway, linking smaller economic and tourism centers to the Corridors 2020 backbone system. USH 14/61 is a federal/state long truck route, allowing trucks up to 19.5 meters (65 feet) in length to use the highway. USH 14/61 is a designated access management corridor under WisDOT's *Statewide Access Management Plan*. As such, the corridor is intended to maintain a high level of service for through traffic while providing reasonable local road and property access.

Due to existing and forecast traffic volumes, existing roadway geometrics, numerous access points, and delays encountered for traffic traveling through Viroqua and Westby, the

existing USH 14/61 corridor within the study area is not fully consistent with the overall system linkage and route importance elements.

Existing Highway Characteristics

Under present peak hour traffic volumes, all sections along the USH 14/61 corridor are over Design Capacity, and three sections are approaching or at Maximum Capacity. Under 2025 morning and evening peak traffic volumes, all sections will be over Design Capacity, and all will be at or approaching Maximum Capacity.

There are more than 75 access points along USH 14/61 outside Viroqua and Westby, more than 170 access points in Viroqua, and more than 110 access points in Westby. Cross traffic and turning traffic combined with speed changes and lack of auxiliary lanes, reduces operational efficiency, capacity, travel speed, and safety along the existing highway.

Local Issues

High volumes of heavy truck traffic in downtown Viroqua and Westby contribute substantially to congestion, and are an added safety concern for pedestrian traffic. Congestion also affects school bus operations and safety. Drivers indicate it is difficult to enter and exit USH 14/61 from side streets in Viroqua and Westby. Congestion in Viroqua is incompatible with that city's Main Street Program objectives to revitalize the central business district in a way that attracts visitors, new business, and that offers a safe and pedestrian-friendly environment for shopping and other activities.

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